

EMOTIONAL LITERACY SUPPORT ASSISTANT (ELSA) INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

What is ELSA?

The ELSA project is an initiative designed to help schools meet the needs of emotionally vulnerable pupils from within their own resources.

ELSAs are emotional literacy support assistants working in schools. They:

- *Help children recognise, understand and manage emotions to increase success*
- *Plan and deliver individual and small group support programmes*
- *Receive training and supervision from Educational Psychologists*

Children learn better and are happier in school if their emotional needs are met. When children's emotional and cognitive energy is focused on their personal and interpersonal difficulties, their capacity to concentrate on learning new information and skills is reduced.

ELSAs plan and deliver programmes of support to children identified within school as likely to benefit from additional help to increase their emotional literacy. Programmes would normally last between half to one term, and occasionally a little longer. Children may for example receive support to recognise and manage their emotions, raise their self-esteem, improve peer relationships, recover from significant loss or bereavement, and resolve conflict effectively.

Most of the support is individual and builds on the relationship of trust that is developed between the pupil and the ELSA. Some skills will be enhanced through small group work, particularly social and friendship skills (although some children will need individual support first).

ELSAs undertake 6 days of training to help them understand, plan and deliver interventions, followed by half-termly group supervision sessions with other local ELSAs. This is on-going CPD for your ELSAs, and in order to be registered with the ELSA network, these supervisions sessions are mandatory. They give space to discuss casework, share resources and build connections. Being trained as an ELSA does not give the title for life. ELSAs are required to be registered and attendance at all the sessions and supervision are a requirement for registration. If an ELSA does not perform the role for a period of time, they may be deregistered.

Supervision

An essential part of the ELSA initiative is the on-going support of Educational Psychologists to continue building the competence and confidence of ELSAs. This will take place in local cluster groups with an EP who works in the local area.

Time for ELSAs to take part in supervision must be ringfenced and supervision dates should go into the school diary at the beginning of the year. The only acceptable reasons for missing supervision would be for illness, unplanned personal leave or for a hospital appointment. To give perspective, one missed session would leave an ELSA with half a term of supervision missed and two missed sessions is a whole term with no support.

There is a distinction between managerial and clinical supervision. ELSAs are still line-managed within their own schools, but the EP supervision sessions are typically perceived more as 'clinical supervision' and involve attention to the psychology behind needs and behaviour. Within supervision groups useful problem-solving approaches can be modelled using the expertise of the supervising EP. The groups also offer an opportunity to build supportive relationships between ELSAs, enabling the sharing of ideas and possibly some resources.

These sessions will last approximately two hours every half term and tend to be in groups of around eight. It is important when considering an ELSA for your school, that this time is factored into their role moving forward.

Essential Qualities for ELSAs

It is vital for head teachers to think carefully about their choice of staff to train as ELSAs. A prospective ELSA should be able to create a safe and supportive environment where children who may be struggling emotionally or socially feel comfortable opening up and developing positive relationships.

That in itself is not enough. The initiative is predicated on the ability of ELSAs to think creatively about how to facilitate the development of new skills in the young people with whom they work. They must be able to work independently because they will be required to develop their own programmes of work, write session plans and reflect on outcomes. Ideally, this should be a Teaching Assistant, Learning Support Assistant, HLTA, or Learning Mentor with capacity to plan and deliver interventions consistently.

Above all, a member of staff wishing to become an ELSA will need to have the desire to learn, as there is a considerable amount of new learning involved in this role.

School commitment

Schools must ensure:

- *ELSAs are released for all training and supervision sessions.*
- *ELSAs are allocated at least one day per week to undertake their work. This includes ringfenced time for adequate planning, as well as the delivery of regular sessions to the children referred for support.*
- *ELSAs have a suitable space (pleasant and semi-private) where they can work with pupils.*
- *ELSAs have a budget which allows them to periodically purchase new resources (games, books, puppets) to develop their work.*
- *That finance is protected to maintain the ELSA role year on year.*
- *That the ELSA is promoted around the school for example having displays around the school.*
- *Schools should be offering good line management in school for ELSAs. The line manager is responsible for promoting and raising the status of the ELSA in school and advocating for the ELSA*
- *Line managers should be helping to manage an ELSA's workload including making it clear how children are referred to ELSAs. (Other staff should not be approaching ELSAs on an ad hoc basis for guidance and advice).*

Benefits to pupils

The impact of ELSA work in Hampshire has been thoroughly evaluated over time and has been published in national publications as well as internally. These are some of the key benefits that have been shown:

- *For some pupils it is the first time in their lives that any adult has given time to genuinely listen and understand how life is for them.*
- *ELSA intervention helps youngsters become more self-reflective and better at expressing their needs.*
- *They are helped to build more positive relationships, both with peers and adults, leading to improved self-esteem and greater success in terms of learning outcomes.*

Benefits to school

There are clear benefits for the school as a whole:

- *When emotional vulnerability is recognised, there is a member of staff on hand who can offer support to pupils, or advice to other staff.*
- *Behavioural difficulties have been shown to decrease in pupils who receive ELSA support for a period of time. This increases the learning not only of the pupil receiving input, but the knock-on effect of reduced disruptions improves the learning environment for fellow classmates too.*
- *Other staff benefit from the new insights and skills that ELSAs bring to school. Experience shows that they are often consulted by other staff about pupil concerns.*
- *Schools find themselves better able to manage pupil difficulties for themselves, without having to wait for outside assistance.*
- *It can be a really helpful role to support children and offer advice to staff and families should the school experience a critical incident.*

Feedback from ELSA'S

"The children are able to talk about their emotions after only a few sessions". Staff felt that pupils were better at recognising and regulating their emotions and that pupil self-esteem had increased.

ELSA has helped to *"build positive relationships with a trusted adult"* both pupil-teacher and pupil-pupil relationships were strengthened as a consequence.

"It is great that it is student led because they set the focus".

"Constant communication is vital for good practice". ELSA's liked the idea of supervision but hadn't engaged at the time.

"The number of children with SEMH needs has skyrocketed to levels that we've never seen before... ELSA sits nicely aside what we already offer"

Contact details

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